

Transcription: Wallace Kelm

Today is Thursday, October 25th, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Wallace Kelm. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, and Mr. Kelm is at his residence in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.

Wallace Kelm: Thank you.

Sir, the first question we always start off with is please just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the service.

Wallace Kelm: Before I went into the service, I lived in Bartlett, Texas. It's about 6 miles out of Bartlett on a farm out there, and I picked cotton and topped corn and got tired to look at that meals, so I joined the Navy.

And you joined in 1938.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

What was it that attracted you to the Navy out of all the other branches?

Wallace Kelm: Well, I'd see different boys going in and they all liked it and everything, so I thought I'd follow suit with them.

Did you sign up in Austin?

Wallace Kelm: I signed up at Austin but I had to go to Houston to be sworn in.

OK, so they inducted you in Houston, and then did they send you to San Diego for your boot camp?

Wallace Kelm: I went to San Diego for boot camp, right.

What are your memories of leaving home in 1938 and going off to boot camp?

Wallace Kelm: It was real easy being out there after leaving the farm out there.

So it wasn't anything that you were scared of or afraid of.

Wallace Kelm: Not too much.

So when you got out there, I guess did you know at that point what you were going to be doing in the Navy after you graduated?

Wallace Kelm: No, I didn't. I was assigned to the USS Lexington.

Which was an aircraft carrier, right?

Wallace Kelm: It was a large aircraft carrier at the time, yes.

What was your specialty?

Wallace Kelm: Well, when I went aboard, I went aboard as a seaman recruit and I started into boats, then I got into, they had an opening there for a gunner's mate so I got into be a gunner's mate, and wound up as a gunner's mate.

What can you tell us about the Lexington? What are some memories you have of the USS Lexington?

Wallace Kelm: Oh, the old Lexington, it was a real good ship. It was well organized, and it had just got back off of the Amelia Earhart cruise when I went aboard. Then they pulled us around to the East coast. We went to New York, was supposed to go into the World's Fair there, and the Japanese started moving their fleet around, so they pulled us back around to the West coast and we went to Treasure Island to the fire they had going on out there then.

And so even in 1938 and '39, it was clear that some things were happening, especially in the Pacific with Japanese. Did you ever think though that you were going to go to war at that point?

Wallace Kelm: Well, we thought we were, yes. We kept training for it all the time.

Where were you on December 7th of '41?

Wallace Kelm: I was transferred off the USS Lexington to the USS Hornet, and I was in Norfolk, Virginia. The Hornet was in commission, but we wasn't ready to go yet.

And that was another aircraft carrier.

Wallace Kelm: October the 20th of '41, yes.

And so on December 7th of '41, do you remember that day?

Wallace Kelm: Right, I remember the day, yes. They wanted to break out ammunition and everything. Guns, we wasn't ready to shoot, but they wanted the ammunition anyway.

How long was it then after the war started before they were able to get you underway?

Wallace Kelm: Well, we got underway not too long after that we made a shakedown in the Gulf of Mexico, then went right around to the West coast and started operating and went into Alameda and loaded on 16 B-25's which we carried to Japan. We made the first run on Japan.

That's right.

Wallace Kelm: And then we started operating off of, down to Solomon Islands down there.

You mentioned the B-25's, that's the famous Mitchell Raid, correct?

Wallace Kelm: Doolittle, right.

I mean Doolittle Raid. So you were aboard the Hornet that day?

Wallace Kelm: Right, I was on the Hornet. I put it in commission and I was on her until she was sunk.

Tell us about the Doolittle Raid, what that was like.

Wallace Kelm: Well, we were supposed to go on into 400 miles and they picked up a little fishing boat out there, and Admiral Hall said get 'em off, and they sent 'em off ahead of time about 600 miles out instead of 400 miles. They had a hard time making it with the fuel and everything. They put gasoline in milk cans aboard the planes and everything.

Were you able to see the bombers as they took off?

Wallace Kelm: Oh yeah, I sent up the bombs and I followed the bombs right on up, and on the flight deck they was tying some metals on the tail end to send back to Japan what they had received before the war. I was right there on the deck where they was tying them on.

I've read when the bombers flew off the deck that they were playing music over the intercom. Is that right?

Wallace Kelm: I'm sure they was, yeah.

I've heard some stories that one of the songs was Goodbye Mama, I'm Off to Yokohama?

Wallace Kelm: I don't recall that, I'm not sure.

I've heard that from some folks that that was kind of a popular song and some of them were playing it over the IMC. So you said you stayed aboard the Hornet until it was sunk.

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Tell us about that.

Wallace Kelm: Well, we went through the Battle of Midway before that when a few battles before that, and then we were sunk in the Battle of Santa Cruz, and they hit us with 126 planes and we had about three planes dove into us and we got torpedoed and bombed, and then we had the North Hampton had us in tow, was gonna tow us, and we was barely moving, and they come in on us again, so they kicked the tow line off and left us setting there. Then they hit us a couple of more torpedoes and it just almost, they found a ship about 4 o'clock I guess that evening, they found a ship, and we went over the line into the water with a K-pot and life jacket on. Destroyer came alongside and picked us up, and they stopped and about the time we didn't get aboard, they'd take off, and they did that a couple of times, and the third time when that destroyer stopped, I got on the screw guard there and crawled aboard. I was the first one aboard that destroyer. We were doing 28 knots that night and them Japs was closed in on us. They had battleships and a task group. Heaviest thing we had was heavy critters.

When they gave the abandon ship order, did you have any worry that you weren't going to make it?

Wallace Kelm: No, I thought I was going to make it all the time. I looked forward to getting aboard that ship.

I'm sure. So when the Hornet was sunk, I'm sure that had to have been pretty tough though. I mean that's a ship you were a part of. Did you actually see it sink?

Wallace Kelm: No, we didn't actually see it. What happened -

Got out of there before that.

Wallace Kelm: They had to help sink it in order to keep it from getting into the hands of the Japanese.

Understood. So at that point after you were rescued by one of the other ships, where do you go to next?

Wallace Kelm: We went down to New Caledonia down there on a mountain up there for a couple of weeks and then they reassembled us and sent us back to the States for leave and reassignment.

Did they let you talk to anybody about what had happened to the Hornet, or were you told to keep it quiet?

Wallace Kelm: No, we didn't talk to nobody about the ship. They didn't want to talk about it.

I understand from what I've read, too, that the Navy rightly so didn't want the Japanese to know everything that was going on, so there were times when a ship was sunk they would keep the crew kind of off to themselves for a couple of months or they would make sure they weren't talking or letting folks know so the Japanese wouldn't know what had happened to certain ships. Do you think that's kind of what happened when they took you to New Caledonia, because you said you spent a few weeks there?

Wallace Kelm: We spent I think about two weeks there, yeah.

And they kept you kind of together as a ship's crew, correct?

Wallace Kelm: Right, we was all together there, and they reassigned some to ships there in Honolulu. Some of them didn't get to go back to the States. They had got reassigned. But I made it back to the States for leave and reassignment.

When you got back for leave, did you have a chance to come back to Texas?

Wallace Kelm: Right, I had 30 days' leave, yeah. I went back to Bartlett and spent 30 days there.

How did that feel getting to come back home?

Wallace Kelm: It felt real good.

So you took the 30 days, spent them in Texas, and then you had to go back to Treasure Island, is that correct?

Wallace Kelm: No, I went back to the East coast and picked up the Princeton. It was a light carrier. Put her in commission, set her down and everything, and went to the Calpines for a while. Kind of a light carrier. And after that, I went to Bunker Hill. Now at Bunker Hill, I stayed, we went around, I don't know, it was ready to go and loaded and everything ready, went around to the West coast and started operating. We was in every operations there was that they had.

Tell us a little bit of what a typical day was like aboard ship during World War II, if there was such a thing as a typical day.

Wallace Kelm: Well, out in the war zone out there, you'd see planes come around us like in the evenings there, we used to have what they called Betty's, torpedo planes make runs, circle around us. Just like a movie, but as far as the day, you had your routine work to do. We had to keep up the guns and everything, maintain 'em, had the magazines, check it and everything.

Tell us about some of the men that served in your crew. Do you have any memories of some of the guys that you were on the ships with?

Wallace Kelm: Oh yeah, well I had this one boy from Boston, him and I was transferred. We was transferred over to different ships together. Every time I'd get transferred, he'd get transferred. We went to four different ships.

Were you pretty good friends?

Wallace Kelm: We were real good friends, yeah.

Did you stay in touch with him after the war?

Wallace Kelm: I lost contact with him doing there, right after the war I guess, somewhere along the line.

How old were most of the guys in the Navy? I assume they were all pretty young.

Wallace Kelm: When they went in, yes, they were real young.

Now the fact that you'd been in for about three years when the war started, I'm guessing you were kind of a senior guy to a lot of them.

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Did they look up to you? You were kind of I guess in some sort of a leadership role then, being a little bit more senior.

Wallace Kelm: Oh yeah, they followed you.

I would guess then once the war got going, I imagine quite a few of them were those that had come in after Pearl Harbor, is that correct?

Wallace Kelm: Oh yeah, most of 'em.

What about the officers on your ship? Did you see much of them or have much interaction with them?

Wallace Kelm: I had some good officers that I operated with, yeah. Our gunnery officer mainly, he was one I had contact with. They were real good.

So on the Hornet for example, you were a gunner on the Hornet, is that correct?

Wallace Kelm: Right, I had made 3rd class gunner's mate on the Hornet and I was supposed to make 2nd class before we got sunk, and I never did get 2nd class until later on down, years, about six to eight months later I guess.

What type of guns were they that you were assigned to?

Wallace Kelm: We had 5", 38-40 millimeter and 20 millimeters.

What was your favorite to fire of those?

Wallace Kelm: Twin mount, 5" 38's was a real good gun.

And why was that?

Wallace Kelm: Well, it was in close, you didn't get all that blast, and we fired one magnetic fuse on one side, and one time fuse on the other side and you can tell where you used it. Only thing they just didn't have enough range.

OK, and how many men would be on a gun when it was firing?

Wallace Kelm: Oh, on a twin mount you'd have about 15 I guess.

Because it took a lot of men I would guess to keep the ammo resupplied and all that went into it.

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Did you keep track of how many enemy aircraft you were able to knock down, or was that something you all even paid attention to?

Wallace Kelm: No, we never did see. Gun control, fire control had us control of your gun when you were actually in full combat. You don't have to control that. Local control down at the guns anyway.

So it's really more just getting the ammo loaded in and making sure the weapon is cycling properly.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

So once you get back out in the Pacific, and you said what was the ship you were with the most after the Hornet? The Bunker Hill I think?

Wallace Kelm: The Bunker Hill. We got the president unit citation on Bunker Hill and I don't know how many battles we was in. I wrote for it once and never did find out how many battles we were in.

What were some of the battles though that stand out to you the most of the ones that you were in? I know I think you said you were in the Battle of Midway early on.

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Are there any that stand out to you in particular or things that were distinctive from one battle to the next?

Wallace Kelm: Well the Battle of Midway was the real one. We lost a whole torpedo squad and torpedo 8 in the Battle of Midway, and that really suckered everybody up on the ship. Most all of the pilots were just commissioned, you know, it was real bad on the ship.

I imagine. Did you realize at that point what a big battle Midway was, what a turning point type of battle it was?

Wallace Kelm: Oh yeah. We kept track of all the carriers and everything.

When did you know that the battle was going to happen? Was it something that they -

Wallace Kelm: Oh, we knew the day before it was going to, in fact they said today they give the carriers away, that's what they was saying on the ship.

So you all knew it was coming then.

Wallace Kelm: Yeah.

How did most of the sailors deal with something like that, going into a battle, was it excitement, were they excited to be part of the battle, or was there any sort of hidden fear?

Wallace Kelm: It was routine after being out there so long, it's just a routine. It didn't make much difference until they started hitting your ship, and then it made a difference once it started hitting you.

How did you react, or how did most sailors react the first time they experienced their ship getting hit by the enemy?

Wallace Kelm: Well just like I said, it didn't make too much difference as long as you was floatin' and it didn't hit you.

I just didn't know if it was something that was kind of shocking the first time it happened.

Wallace Kelm: Well, some of them would go into stage fright, you know, you'd have a different personality.

Were you with the Bunker Hill when the war ended?

Wallace Kelm: No no, I left the Bunker Hill right before she got hit. She got hit with a couple of kamikaze's.

Oh, a couple of kamikaze's hit the Bunker Hill, OK.

Wallace Kelm: Yeah, and she burned real bad, almost lost her.

So what ship were you aboard then when the war ended?

Wallace Kelm: I was aboard the Sawdust, the USS Sawdust. It was a LSV-4. It was supposed to have been vehicles, carrying vehicles in, but the vehicle deck wasn't built high enough to mount the guns and everything, so they converted us into a troop carrier. We was carrying troops. We was second ship in formation went in, the sights boats at Japan when the war was over.

What was that like when you learned that the war was finished?

Wallace Kelm: That was a good thing, glad to see it happen.

Did they tell you over the intercom, or did you hear about it just kind of word of mouth?

Wallace Kelm: Oh, we heard it on the intercom, yeah. Well, we was second ship's formation went in.

So I imagine it was a lot of excitement and elation that you weren't going to have to make the invasion.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

What are your memories, sir, of arriving in Japan? Tell us what you remember from getting into Japan.

Wallace Kelm: Being in Japan, we'd go in there, the first two weeks they would bow to you, but after two weeks, they got the American out of us.

I imagine they were probably a little bit scared of the Americans weren't they?

Wallace Kelm: I guess.

They had been told for so long that the Americans were going to kill them all I think. How long did you end up spending in Japan with the occupation force?

Wallace Kelm: Oh, we wasn't in there too long, but we went back, you know after, back and forth after that I was in there, in and out, different ships.

And that was in Seisbo?

Wallace Kelm: Placerbo.

OK, and then at that point, you needed to return back home to the United States?

Wallace Kelm: I come back to, I went to Honolulu. No, I went to Shanghai, China, that's right. I got orders to Shanghai.

It seems like you had a chance to move around quite a bit during the war. Was that unusual or was that pretty typical?

Wallace Kelm: This was after the war was over with, at Shanghai, China, in '46-'47 I was in Shanghai.

But I was saying sir, even before that on some of the number of different ships that you were on, obviously the Hornet was sunk, but you were on the Bunker Hill and I think you said a couple of other ships, right?

Wallace Kelm: Two other carriers, yeah. Then I went to Amphibious which was Asogus.

Was that something you wanted to do, to go to some of the different ships, or did they just kind of tell you hey, you got orders, you're moving to another ship now?

Wallace Kelm: I'd get my orders.

I was just curious because sometimes you hear guys that spent all four years aboard one ship and then there's others like yourself that were on several different ships and I'm always curious how that ended up working out that way. Was there one ship that you would consider your favorite?

Wallace Kelm: My favorite ship was the old Lexington, old Lex CV2, yeah.

Why was that?

Wallace Kelm: Well I guess because it was peace time and I spent three years on her, and I knew a lot of people on here. It was like being home.

Sure. What was your least favorite ship?

Wallace Kelm: The least favorite was a couple of ARS's I was on after the war. Deliver and the Conserver.

Why were they your least favorite?

Wallace Kelm: Well they were about 213 feet long and our sea squatters opened up right into the diesel engine room, and all these ____, and you'd do 12 knots and we always had a two behind us. You'd do 12 knots to do 6 knots good and you couldn't get very far very fast.

That sounds pretty miserable, yeah, that does sound miserable.

Wallace Kelm: It was miserable.

How long did you have to spend aboard those ships?

Wallace Kelm: Well I spent on the old Deliver, I spent about two years on there, almost two years. Then I went to the Conserver and I spent about six or seven months on there I think, not too long, as soon as I could get off her.

And you retired from the Navy in 1969?

Wallace Kelm: Right, 30 years yeah.

You had a very long career. How was it that you were able to stay in the Navy when the war ended because I know they did a big draw down and there were a lot of folks that wanted to stay in, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, all the branches, there was such a big draw down that a lot of guys were told they were just being discharged regardless. Was it because you had already come in before the war started?

Wallace Kelm: I was regular Navy. See, they had a lot of Reserves and stuff in there. I was regular Navy and my enlistment I guess carried me over the end of the war up into -

That makes sense. Did you always think, or once you got in the Navy, did you think you wanted to make a career out of it, or was it something that just sort of happened?

Wallace Kelm: Well it more or less started to happen, but I mean it worked out all right, it was working out all right. See, I had 10 years in before I got married and then I didn't have any leave or anything before that, so I had out of the 10 years, I had 2 years started down in Corpus Christi, Texas, and then I had my last 2 years it started here in Austin, Texas.

Oh that's great. What was your assignment in Austin?

Wallace Kelm: I was a recruiter here, Navy recruiter. Then I was recalled after I retired, I was called back recruits for the Reserves.

What years were those?

Wallace Kelm: Well it was after the war. I mean after I retired in '59, it was after '59, '59 and '60.

So you retired in '59, and then they recalled you because you served all the way up until '69, so I guess you did that last 10 years or so on recruiting duty?

Wallace Kelm: Well no, after you retired, you carried on, you're not retired, you're transferred to the fleet Reserves, and you're carried on the roll, in other words, they could recall you for until you get your 30 in.

OK, so you served then on active duty from '38 to '59?

Wallace Kelm: Right.

And then you did, how many years did you do as a recruiter after you'd retired?

Wallace Kelm: I didn't, it was just, I think it was 90 days or something. It was just a temporary deal.

Oh OK, because I saw on here saying that you served until '69, so I was thinking you had served a long time then doing recruiting. I was going to ask you all about that.

Wallace Kelm: No, no.

So then I guess you retired, you came back to Texas, is that right?

Wallace Kelm: Right. I went to work for the Austin Police Department as a city jailer, and I did 28 years and six months as a lead jailer down in the city jail in Austin, Texas.

So you had a long, you were able to retire from a couple of different organizations, the city and the Navy.

Wallace Kelm: Yeah.

That's great.

Wallace Kelm: It was a wonderful job down there.

I'm sure you had to deal with some unpleasant folks at times though.

Wallace Kelm: Right. This was like after the time I retired, I did 20 years and six months. You had to do six months because six months is probation when you start.

Were there any similarities between the City of Austin jail and the Navy brig?

Wallace Kelm: Well, we didn't have, we had a brig on the ships, but very seldom you had anybody in the brigs. You didn't have too many lockups.

I doubt you had many people in the Austin jail on bread and water though by the same token. They probably got treated a little bit better in a city jail, correct?

Wallace Kelm: Well, we handled everybody in the city and the county, and then they'd have to transfer the city over to the county. We handled everything. Everything come through the city then. Now they're saying it's over to the county. Everybody goes through the county and they closed the city jail.

I imagine that's tough work dealing with some of the folks that come through there.

Wallace Kelm: Yeah, I've had as high as three people having an epileptic seizure at one time up there. They don't take their medication and come up there, and go into their seizures and stuff. You just had all you could do to try to keep them from hurting themselves is about all you could do.

Yeah, boy, and when was it that you retired as a jailer?

Wallace Kelm: '83.

'83, yes sir. I was going to ask you, sir, going back a little bit, mentioning the Lexington, I know it's down in Corpus Christi now.

Wallace Kelm: No, not that one.

Oh, it's a different one, OK.

Wallace Kelm: That's a different one.

That's the second one.

Wallace Kelm: ____.

OK, I had gotten them confused. I knew there were a couple of different ones, but I didn't realize that wasn't the same. Have you ever gone down to see that one though?

Wallace Kelm: Yes, I've been a boarder. In fact, they kept me aboard free.

That's great. What were the biggest differences then between your Lexington and the one that's down there now? Obviously it was a little bit newer, but were there some differences or some similarities?

Wallace Kelm: Well, the old Lexington, she had a teak wood flight deck made out of teak wood, and the new Lex had a metal flight deck, and it was more modern.

On the Lexington that you were aboard, how was the food? Was it pretty good?

Wallace Kelm: We usually had a good mess, yeah, a good mess. It was good feed.

Were you able to get mail from home pretty regularly?

Wallace Kelm: Mail, well I didn't write too much and my folks didn't write too much. I didn't get too much mail. I had a little girlfriend before I went in. That didn't last too long after I left.

What about news from the outside world? Did you know kind of what was going on back in the States when you were out at sea?

Wallace Kelm: Right, we kept up with the news, yeah.

So I guess you had maybe the Armed Forces radio or a newspaper occasionally?

Wallace Kelm: We kept up, we was out there where it was happening. We usually had a news correspondent aboard the carriers. We had Raymond Clapper I think it was aboard the Bunker Hill there. In fact he got shot down over there.

Yeah, I know they had a lot of reporters out there in the carriers, in some of the big ships it would make sense that they would have some aboard the carriers.

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Did you ever have a chance to go to any reunions for any of your ships?

Wallace Kelm: The old Lexington used to have reunions all the time. They'd have them all over the United States. I really liked to go to them. When they reached 50 years, why everybody got so old it was hard to get everything together. They sent everything they had left, they sent it down to the Lexington down in Corpus Christi.

That's good. Sir, I don't know if I asked you this before or not, but were you part of that honor flight recently that went to Washington DC?

Wallace Kelm: Right, I just made the honor flight.

I think that's where you got my card from.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

Tell us, sir, about that experience.

Wallace Kelm: Well, the first thing, they give us that World War II cap and everything. They should let us wear the caps of the ships that we served on. That way you can tell, when you talk to somebody. So I had that World War II cap on and I finally put that Hornet cap on and everybody started talking to me.

What was the trip like from Austin to Washington and back?

Wallace Kelm: Oh it was a good trip. It was fast. Fast, good trip, yeah.

It was only a couple of days I guess.

Wallace Kelm: One day, one night.

Went up there, spent the night and came back the next day. What did you think of the memorial?

Wallace Kelm: The memorial, it was real nice. It was good. We saw the memorials. We went out to the national cemetery. We saw the changing of the watch up there. That was good.

How about how you all were treated by everybody?

Wallace Kelm: In Washington, we had real respect, I mean everybody just -

That's great. I had heard some people say that you all were treated very well which is good to hear that it was just a good experience all the way around.

Wallace Kelm: They had officers pushing the wheelchairs up there, Marine Corps and the Army and the Air Force. The colonel was pushing around the wheelchairs. I had a female major pushing me around.

That's great. That's good to hear that they rolled out the red carpet so well for everybody.

Wallace Kelm: They did, yeah they did.

Did you have a chance to take anybody with you on that trip?

Wallace Kelm: No, I didn't.

Went solo?

Wallace Kelm: Yeah, I went by myself. My wife, she has this ulcer, she's got this dementia. I am having a hard time.

Sure, I understand.

Wallace Kelm: She's at the beauty parlor right now, otherwise I wouldn't be able to talk.

I think it was your daughter told me that this would be a good time to do the interview, so I'm grateful for that. This program, I don't know how much I told you about it, but this program is part of the state of Texas, and our whole goal is to save these interviews for future generations, for posterity, and we have documents here that go back to the 1700s. We have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that first came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo, and so our goal is to take these interviews and add them to that archive so that hundreds of years from now hopefully people can listen to these interviews and learn something about those that had served in our military, especially those that were in World War II. With that in mind, sir, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview a hundred years from now? Any advice or words of wisdom?

Wallace Kelm: I would just say try to keep from having wars instead of going to war, because it's just like everything else, you don't gain too much by having these wars.

Yeah, I'm sure. I don't think anybody is a fan of being at war, especially if they've been in one themselves like you were. So when you got back home, I guess you said you served about 10 years before you got married, is that right?

Wallace Kelm: Right.

Is your wife an Austin native?

Wallace Kelm: She's from Austin, Texas, yes. Come to find out when I filled out my Navy papers and everything, the same doctor delivered me delivered her. Her mother was living in Mordlin at the time when she was born.

That's quite surprising. You don't hear that very often.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

It must have been meant to be if that was the case.

Wallace Kelm: I guess. We've been together 65 years.

Congratulations. And do you have any children?

Wallace Kelm: Yes, I have a boy and two girls, then she has a stepdaughter.

That's great. And do they ask you a lot about your time in the Navy?

Wallace Kelm: No, they don't talk too much about it, don't ask, not too interested. It's like it seems like everybody I run into, they say oh, my daddy was in the Navy. I say what ship was he on? Oh, I don't know.

They probably don't. Well I think it's amazing, sir, that you served for so long and even before the war began, but to me especially the part about being on the Hornet, the Doolittle Raid, that's just such a historic event, I think maybe a lot of Americans unfortunately don't realize how momentous that was, but that was really a great moment in American history, especially in terms of changing the morale and the feel of the war to be able to strike back against Japan was really the first time since Pearl Harbor. That's amazing, the fact that you were able to see that is just really something. Did you have a chance to interact with any of those men on those crews before they took off?

Wallace Kelm: No I didn't. Doolittle's navigator used to be out at Bergstrom out here.

I didn't know that.

Wallace Kelm: He was out there and I had a friend of mine, he was a W4 warrant officer, he always wanted me to get him and I together, but we never did get together and he died two or three years back.

Yeah, I'm not sure how many of those original Doolittle Raiders are still with us. There might be a few. I know even from that mission after the successful bombing, I believe at least one or two of the planes crashed if I remember correctly, and some of the crews were captured and held as POWs.

Wallace Kelm: That's right.

And then just the way they flew those bombers off the carrier, what did you think about that? That had to have been a strange sight to see that.

Wallace Kelm: Well, they had to redo the Hornet, the bridge section up there, before they, they were getting ready for it a long time. They made plans for it and everything.

Didn't they have to draw a line down the flight deck for where, I guess it was the left wing of each plane stuck out over the water, isn't that right?

Wallace Kelm: Well they got close as they could to the stack of the ship there, yeah, pretty close quarters.

Yeah, from the photographs I've seen it looked like it was pretty tight, because there was no way they were going to be able to land them, it was just they could take off that way, so they could just barely take off and then after that, they had to get to China I guess. That's amazing, sir. It's an honor to be able to talk to you and from especially all your service in World War II and especially aboard the Hornet, it's unbelievable. Are there any questions I'm not asking that I should, any memories in particular that stand out or events that you want to share with us?

Wallace Kelm: I can't think of any right now. Something went across my mind right before, but I done lost it, I don't know what it was.

Well sir, I really appreciate you taking some time out of your day to let me call and do this interview, and it's just an honor for us, an honor for our program, and it's just kind of a small way for the state of Texas to say thank you to you for your service to our nation, and so like I mentioned before, be looking in a week or two. I've got your address on that card you sent, and in a week or two I'll be sending you copies of this interview on CD's along with a nice letter and signed certificate from Commissioner Patterson. Please consider that just a small token of our gratitude on behalf of the state of Texas.

Wallace Kelm: OK, thank you for taking the interest.

Oh yes sir, absolutely, and also if you have any friends that have served in the military, doesn't even have to be World War II, it can be any time period, please have them give me a call because we're always looking for veterans to interview for our program.

Wallace Kelm: All right, sure will.

All right sir, well thank you very much and take care.

Wallace Kelm: OK, thank you.

[End of recording]